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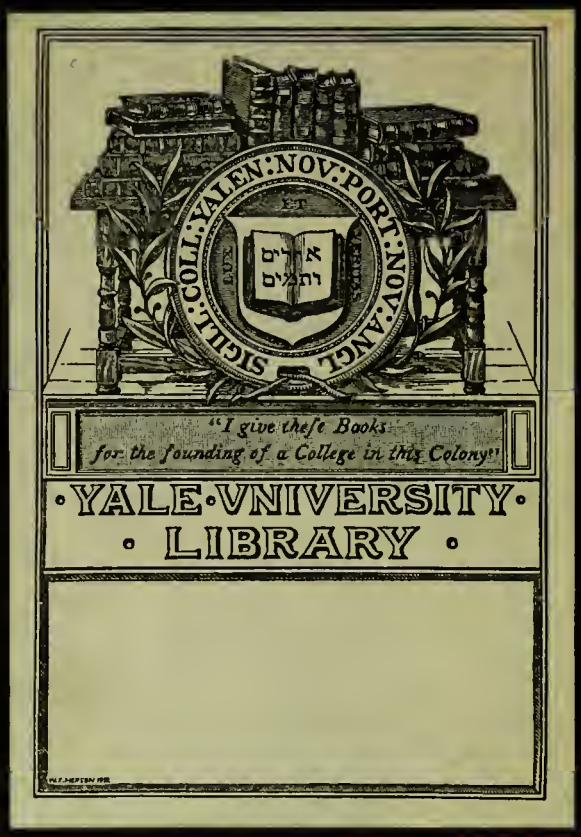
Principles of the treatment of gout ...

London, 1835.



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PRINCIPLES

OF

THE TREATMENT OF GOUT,

&c. &c.

JOSEPH MALLETT, PRINTER,
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PRINCIPLES

OF THE

TREATMENT OF GOUT;

WITH A

FURTHER EXAMINATION

OF THE

EFFECTS OF COLCHICUM AS A REMEDY;

AND SOME

OBSERVATIONS ON THE USE OF VERATRIA

IN THAT DISEASE.

BY SIR CHARLES SCUDAMORE, M.D., F.R.S.,

HONORARY DOCTOR OF MEDICINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, ETC. ETC.

Ex medicina nihil oportet putare proficisci, nisi quod ad corporis utilitatem spectet; quoniam ejus causa est instituta.—CICERO MEDICUS.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMAN,

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1835.

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PREFACE.

THE "march of intellect" has not been confined to politics and mechanics, but has extended itself to the practice of physic; which, in former times, was held sacred to the lore of the wig, and the authority of the gold-headed cane.

Within these few years we have seen the most familiar employment made of the most powerful medicines; for example, calomel in the nursery; colchicum amongst gouty persons; and iodine in country villages, amongst the poor.*

* When I was at Buxton last year, I was informed by the Chemist there, that since the introduction of iodine as a

I have every respect for the exercise of common sense in regard to the management of health. So far, domestic medicine is useful and proper: and I have no desire to cloak the practice of physic with mystery, and unnecessary concealments. At the same time, I oppose myself to those popular attempts, which profess to render a very difficult and responsible art easy of attainment.

The great Father of Physic, in his first Aphorism, emphatically told us, "that life is short, art long, the occasion sudden, experiment fallacious, and judgment difficult."

Anxious that my humble efforts to expose the prevailing dangerous error, respecting the use of colchicum, should have the best chance of success, I have compressed my statements and

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medicine, the tincture was bought by the country people in large quantities, and used by them very freely, without advice, as a remedy for the enlargement of the thyroid gland, commonly called the Derbyshire neck.

opinions within the narrowest space;—in this manner, making only slight demand on the time and patience of the reader.

I am well assured that the whole subject of which I treat is full of importance, both to the profession and the public.

Wimpole Street,
March 20, 1835.

PRINCIPLES

OF

THE TREATMENT OF GOUT,

&c. &c.

In the following pages, I purpose to lay down what I conceive to be the right principles of treating gout; and to examine again the real pretensions of colchicum as a remedy in this painful disorder; to which I shall add some observations on the external use of veratria. Having delivered my general sentiments on gout in a regular Treatise* ; and having also offered many observations on colchicum, in a separate publication; I shall, on the present occasion, confine myself within the narrow limits of a pamphlet.

Thirty years have passed away since I first

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* A Treatise on the Nature and Cure of Gout and Gravel; with general Observations on Morbid States of the Digestive Organs; and on Regimen. Fourth edition, revised and enlarged.

directed my particular attention to the consideration of gout; and, as each succeeding year has added largely to my experience, I hope I may, without incurring the charge of vanity and presumption, confidently present to the reader a code of principia or principles, which may serve as a safe guidance to the knowledge and treatment of the disease.

The question may probably be asked, is any further information required by the profession or the public on the subject of gout?—is it not already well and even familiarly understood? My reply is, that, in my opinion, very great and dangerous errors continue to be committed in the management of gout. I cannot help expressing my apprehension that it is sometimes treated in a superficial manner even by the profession; and it is unquestionable, that the patient who undertakes his own cure, as is so common a practice, with wine of colchicum, or Wilson's tincture, or Reynolds' specific, takes up arms against the permanent welfare and safety of his health and constitution. In the prosecution of my subject, I shall endea-

vour to sketch an outline of the nature of gout, and of the systematic principles of treatment which are suited to meet the various circumstances of this important disease.

The gout exhibits itself by external signs, but proceeds entirely from internal constitutional causes. The attention of the patient is almost wholly drawn to the external part of the disease; and the symptoms, which consist of local inflammation, swelling, and pain, and receive the denomination of Gout, appear to his mind to be the main part, or the whole of his disease; and the removal of which symptoms is the pressing object of his solicitude. Rarely, if ever, does he consider that, although all the outward evidence of the disease may vanish, and pass away for a time, the most important part of the cure may yet remain to be performed,—namely, the right adjustment of the internal functions. The question is very naturally asked of the physician, what is gout; what is its real nature; in what particular does it differ from any other painful inflammation?

We are first to consider that it is a specific

inflammation, one sui generis, and depending not only on the constitution, but on peculiarity of constitution. It is very common to see instances in which, as the consequence of errors of diet and other causes, a fulness of habit, an error in the biliary and other secretions, and an excitable condition of the nervous system, all take place very completely without the production of gout. It is evident that, in some constitutions, the gout cannot be produced. It is nevertheless true that, for the most part, gout does arise under these conditions, and begins at that age when, after the growth of the body is matured, a congestion occurs in the system of the vena portarum, or the venous system connected with the liver. I do not think that an instance can be shewn in which a first fit of *acquired* gout is not attended with more or less of such congestion. When gout becomes the established disease of the constitution, it is less simple in its character, and complicates itself with great disorder of the nervous system. It is then called into action by the influence of various remote causes, both those

which affect the mind, and those which affect the body.

The disposition of individual constitution to be affected with one kind of disease rather than another, under the influence of similar exciting causes, involves the difficult, and perhaps inscrutable, question of *proximate* cause, or such invariable condition of the solids or fluids of the body, or of both, as precedes the disease, and may be essential to its existence. The difficulty on this point is not greater with regard to gout, than to most other diseases; as, for example, erysipelas and scrophula, which are equally specific in their nature as gout. I have entered very fully into the theory of gout in my Treatise, and shall now only remark that it is sufficient, for our practical purpose, that we understand the constitutional and local symptoms of the disease, and the predisposing and the exciting causes. Our method of cure is not materially obscured, because our chemical examination of the morbid state of the blood cannot be conducted with

sufficient precision to make us acquainted with the proximate cause.

There is no important disease of the human body which has been so variously considered and treated in different ages, and at different periods, as the gout. It is one of the earliest upon record; and was much noticed by Hippocrates, Aretæus, and others of the ancients. Several of them, of later date than those eminent men just mentioned, speak of the use of hermodactyl (corresponding to the colchicum of the present day), calomel, scammony, and other active medicines. In our own times, the history of the treatment of gout has been very remarkable. Till within the last thirty years, the disease very rarely, during a whole century, came under regular medical treatment. I remember some striking instances in which the most renowned physician in London, at that period, declined making a second visit to the patient when the case was acute gout; considering that it was a disease very little amenable to the influence of medicine. The recommenda-

tion of "patience and flannel" to the gouty sufferer, had passed into an adage; not, however, that he submitted himself simply to such moral endurance, for the free use of Madeira or other stimulants was added, on the plea of keeping the gout "out of the stomach." It cannot be matter of wonder that, by adding fuel to fire in this manner, the inflammatory action of gout was increased; the duration of the paroxysm was indefinitely prolonged; and that a crippled state of the limbs, with various distortions, very commonly resulted from such irrational proceeding.

In the year 1804, Dr. Kinglake, of Taunton, wrote in recommendation of a free immersion of the gouty part in cold water, on the principle of extinguishing the morbid heat, and removing the increased vascular action by the refrigerant and sedative power of cold. In some instances the method succeeded, for a time at least; and it obtained some zealous advocates. Very soon, however, cases of the danger and even of the fatality of the treatment were reported, and the lessons of pru-

dence which were thus severely taught, were not lost on the public mind.

Next came in vogue that powerful and extraordinary medicine, the Eau medicinale; which, I well remember, was hailed by the gouty world as a blessing sent from heaven! No longer was the philosophy of the patient called into requisition for a resigned submission to a confinement of two or three months, under the tortures of this painful disease; for, although the paroxysm might come with all its violence to day, its hold would often yield to the magic power of the medicine ere another sun should set. Alas! this quick deliverance from pain was only a delusion. In my Treatise I have recorded numerous examples, to shew not only the instability of the cure, but the serious injury inflicted on the constitution.

We here see a striking illustration of the disposition of mankind to run into extremes. For a long course of years, the fabled goddess Podagra, as humourously described by Lucian in his drama, appeared to exercise an unresisted tyranny; and the gouty patient submitted

himself a willing martyr to the disease. All at once, however, starting from this lethargy, he rushed to the adoption of schemes of danger, in order to procure immediate relief from pain.

As I hope to shew in the sequel, the safe and proper proceeding is to be found only in the middle path.

I shall now take a cursory review of the respective methods of treatment which are adopted both in regular and irregular practice.

Now and then, but as a rare instance, the individual attacked with gout, leaves the disease to its own course, with the simple exception of paying more than usual attention to the regulation of the bowels, and probably making some reduction in the scale of diet;—in the use of wine especially; but sometimes no deviation from the ordinary indulgences of the table is observed in any respect. Those who are so lightly visited with gout may be allowed to leave the case chiefly to nature, and more especially when they make the assurance that they derive very sensible benefit from the

fit. These examples, however, are so few, that they may be viewed wholly as exceptions to the general rule.

Of Bleeding.—General bleeding is never to be thought of as a remedy for the local inflamtion, which it does not tend to relieve as it does common inflammation, when that is connected with increased action of the heart and arteries. Formerly it was considered highly improper, and by some even thought to be dangerous, to use the lancet in the incidental diseases of a gouty person; but this is an exploded error. If any important viscus be inflamed in a gouty patient, whether in accidental connection with the paroxysm, or occurring when no gout is present, general bleeding is to be employed as in any other case, according to the force of the symptoms, and the powers of the individual constitution. Also, if there be, at any time, well marked symptoms of congestion in any organ—in the brain more especially—blood should be taken away freely. If general plethora be very manifest, in conjunction with a strong pulse, indicative of good power in the

system, a bleeding may be practised with a view to lessen the quantity of the circulating blood. This method of practice is to be distinguished, I repeat, from the use of bleeding as a remedy for the gout in the extremities, which it would rarely tend to remove.

Nor is local bleeding by leeches so successful as we might be led to expect. It is much more so in rheumatic inflammation. It is often disadvantageous, and occasionally even injurious, in acute gout; rather aggravating than relieving the inflammation and pain, I have sometimes seen much permanent weaknes of the joint produced by the free use of leeches; and, now and then, very troublesome sores follow from the bites.

In some instances of chronic gout, when the symptoms have possessed a more than usual local character, I have seen benefit arise from the application of leeches.

How entirely the inflammation of gout in its primary character may be viewed as of a peculiar kind, and entirely as the offspring of internal causes, as also its very distinct nature

from common inflammation, is shewn in the practice to which I have before referred, adopted in former times, of drinking Madeira, and covering the affected part with flannel (very improperly it is true, and with the certain consequence of prolonging the disease), without producing that injury and danger which we might expect to follow from such stimulating means.

Of Emetics.—I entertain a higher opinion than formerly of the advantages of producing free vomiting, and especially at the commencement of a severe attack. Unless there are particular contra-indications, I much recommend this as one of the first measures to be adopted; and more especially when, as so commonly happens, the stomach is greatly disordered; the signs of this appearing in a coated tongue, disagreeable state of the palate, irregularity or loss of the appetite, nausea and sour eructations, and flatulence. I have often witnessed an immediate subsidence of the gouty symptoms from the operation of an emetic. I am persuaded also, that I have occa-

sionally succeeded in averting the threatened paroxysm, by the use of an emetic, immediately followed by a mercurial purgative, and by regulation of the diet.

Of Cathartics.—When it is considered how almost wholly a fit of gout appears to result from congestion in the abdominal viscera, more especially from a surcharge in the circulation of the vena portarum (the great vessel which carries the blood from the intestines to the liver) and of the biliary pores, we are at once led by theory to the choice of this class of remedies, and no less confirmed in its propriety by practice. It is incumbent on us to persist in acting with freedom on the bowels from day to day, so long as the alvine discharges exhibit an unnatural character, more particularly as to darkness of colour, which marks a vitiated state of the biliary secretion; or if, on the contrary, the appearance be that of clay or of leaden hue, proving a torpor of the liver; also, when the urine continues to deposit on cooling the brick-dust sediment; always having due regard to the manner in which the patient bears the

evacuating treatment; for the practice of medicine is not to be conducted on abstract principles, but relatively to various circumstances, and to none more than to the powers and temper of each individual constitution.

The superior value of a mercurial purgative in stimulating the excretory ducts of the liver, and thereby causing a more or less free discharge from the biliary pores, is familiarly known. This kind of evacuation is of peculiar importance in gout, in which disease the functions of the liver are so materially concerned. A combination of calomel with compound colocynth extract agrees with most persons; and it is often useful to add a small dose of James's powder. With some, however, the pilula hydrargyri, or the pilula hydr. submur. compos. will agree better than pure calomel. In general, it is better to administer the mercurial dose at night, joined with a little extract of poppy or small proportion of opium, directing a purgative in the morning; which in its composition must be suited to the individual, and the circumstances of his case; and, accordingly, be ren-

dered cordial or saline, actively cathartic, or mildly aperient.

The dense state of the urine, its deep color, and the remarkable quantity of brick-dust or pinkish sediment, which sooner or later in the paroxysm it deposits on cooling, is a clear indication for the employment of diuretics as a part of the medicinal plan. The carbonate of potash joined with the spirit of nitric æther, and compound spirit of juniper, diluted with water and flavored with some pleasant syrup, usually agrees well with the gouty stomach.

Although, on the present occasion, I wish to limit myself to very general statements, and to the laying down of principles, rather than repeat any of those details which I have given in my Treatise, I will mention that as a medicine happily combining the qualities of aperient, diuretic, and sedative to the gouty action, is the draught with magnesia, sulphate of magnesia, acetum colchici, &c. the formula of which will be found in my Treatise.

I have to observe, of the use of mercury in gout, that due care should always be observed

not to produce salivation, or go beyond just making the gum sensible of its influence in any case, and in general not to this amount. I have witnessed the most inconvenient consequences arise from the excessive action of mercury, with an aggravation instead of relief of all the gouty symptoms. It is always important that the patient, when under the influence of mercurial medicine, should most carefully guard against exposure to cold—especially cold with wet—and that his diet and regimen should be regulated with more than usual attention.

Sudorifics. — During the course of acute gout, it is highly desirable that the functions of the skin should be duly performed; and when there is heat of surface, we should endeavour to procure free perspiration at intervals, and especially in the night; for in the day-time, when it is our still more important object to maintain a full action of the bowels, the action of sudorifics would be incompatible.

In strong constitutions, and when there is great increase of the circulation, the combination of tartarized antimony with the aperient

medicines, or with simple salines, according to circumstances, proves very beneficial. In some cases, small and repeated doses of Dover's powder are to be preferred. When there is great difficulty of procuring the desired relaxation of the skin, much advantage will often be obtained by fomenting the stomach and abdomen by means of flannel wrung out of hot water; or by substituting a very large sponge. When exposure to cold has been the particular exciting cause which has brought on the paroxysm; when the heat of the surface is irregular, and particularly when, together with the gout, flying rheumatism is troublesome, much benefit is sometimes obtained from the use of a vapour-bath, administered in the patient's chamber.

Narcotics.—Sydenham, in his "Treatise of the Gout," affirmed "that pain in this disease is the disagreeable remedy of nature, and the more violent it proves, the sooner the fit terminates, and the longer and more perfect is the intermission; and so on the contrary." In these terms he made a strong appeal to the judgment of the patient, that he should bear his sufferings

with fortitude, and forego the aid of medicine; but I must add, that, according to my observation, it rarely happens that the reward of a shorter fit and a longer intermission is thus obtained. The agony of severe gout is such that few would consent to endure it, knowing that they could procure relief from treatment.

I am a decided advocate for such employment of opiates as may be found necessary for the mitigation of pain, and the procuring of sleep at night; and it is better to combine a sudorific with the anodine, so that its influence may be less stimulating. We make our choice between Battley's sedative liquor with tartarized antimony; crude opium with James's powder; and Dover's powder. Some individuals, from peculiarity of constitution, are exceedingly incommoded by any of the usual forms of opium, and are kept awake instead of gaining the comfort of sleep. In these circumstances, the acetate or the muriate of morphia should be chosen, which medicine has, usually, a delightful power of calming the nerves. I am in the habit of using the acetate.

It occasionally happens that a tension of the arterial system counteracts the power of opiates to produce relief from pain; and I have seen instances in which the largest doses, which could with propriety be given, entirely failed to afford material ease. Upon the reduction of the circulation being effected by one or more bleedings from the arm, moderate doses of opiate proved quite successful.

Colchicum.—Upon the real merits of Colchicum as a remedy in Gout, I am anxious, after many years' study and observation of its properties and effects, to record my confirmed opinion. I conceive that there is scarcely any question in practical medicine more interesting and important than this. Its great value as a medicine is unquestionable; but I cannot hesitate to declare, that, in the injudicious manner in which it is popularly employed, it carries with it much more of bane than antidote. Without entering into a discussion at the present moment as to the distinct or identical nature of the eau medicinale, Wilson's tincture, Reynolds' specific, and wine of Colchicum, I shall think it suffi-

cient to assert, that all these medicines act so similarly on the tissues of the animal œconomy, as to lead us to the necessity of concluding that they are agents of precisely the same character, although having different degrees of strength; and this I believe to be in the order in which I have named them.

The immediate operation of the eau medicinale was now and then so violent in its effects, as to raise apprehensions for the safety of the patient; but also it was found that, when most successful in removing the symptoms, which relief was produced as if by a potent charm, the cure was only of short duration. This remedy has been laid aside for many years.

Wilson's tincture still has its advocates; but is no longer in general use. It is less violent in its action than the eau medicinale, and certainly does, in general, exert great power over the symptoms of the fit; but with much repetition it is an injurious medicine, and also disappoints the expectations of the patient; for, with but few exceptions, it interrupts the fits without curing the disease. On the con-

trary, the intervals become shorter in the ratio of its employment.

Reynolds' specific was so manifestly a preparation of colchicum in rum, that, although it had its day of popularity, it was not long preferred to the wine of colchicum. That preparation, used and recommended by the late Sir Everard Home, was for a certain period preferred; but of late years the wine of the shops, either made from the roots or the seeds, has been the active preparation of colchicum in general use. In the first edition of my Treatise, published in 1816, and in the subsequent editions, I have recommended the acetum colchici, as being, on certain grounds, entitled to preference; and to this question I shall return.

I wish now to criticise the merits of colchicum as a curative remedy in gout.

Of its proper and well-considered use, I am as much disposed to bestow my approbation, as I am earnest to condemn its careless employment and abuse.

A few, but, indeed, they constitute the large

minority, are attacked with so slight and manageable a degree of gout, that a few doses, at the most, of the wine of colchicum, prove sufficient to subdue the immediate symptoms. Attention being paid to the digestive organs, the patient soon recovers, and extols the happy powers of colchicum. So long as this moderate use of the medicine exerts a curative power (by which expression I mean, that the return of the disease does not occur at shorter intervals than usual) there does not appear any reasonable ground for disapprobation of the remedy. But I would ask, how many are the examples in which results so simple and fortunate take place? The general fact is, that the colchicum alone exerts only a palliative power in gout; curative, it is true, in more or less quickly removing the present symptoms, but not curative of the causes of these symptoms, which exist in the system. Is not this truth evident, when we so continually witness the quick returns of the paroxysm in the very face of the medicine; and this often to such a degree, that at length the patient has every

reason to feel convinced that his disorder is only suppressed, not cured? Hence, of late years, the public opinion has been much divided as to the pretensions of colchicum, and many of those who were its warmest approvers, are now equally loud in its censure. The irrationality of pursuing a method of treatment which ends in such disappointment, is so striking, that it might appear unnecessary for the pen of the medical critic to offer his protest against it; but I am led to my present task by having witnessed very numerous instances in which the error of continually suppressing the gout by means of colchicum, as popularly employed, has been carried on even to the production of danger and death.

Without doubt, the use of hermodactyl (colchicum) was abandoned by the ancients, from their experience of the many bad consequences which it occasioned. Before and since the time of Sydenham, there was a long inter-regnum, during which very little medical interference with gout was exercised. And now arises the important question—is it safe and

proper to have recourse to colchicum in the treatment of a paroxysm of gout, or not? The disease is so painful, so enervating, and so disqualifying from all the duties and the pleasures of life, that it is most natural for the patient to desire the aid of those means which he knows will afford him the most speedy relief; and, when racked with pain, he is not willing to exchange physic for philosophy, even though there may be mischief in the draught.

With respect to the use of any medicine, it is obvious that the smallest dose with which we can accomplish our object is the best; so far, but no farther, I am an Homœopathic! It is equally clear, that the mildest preparation of any particular medicine, when of sufficient efficacy in the case, is to be preferred to the strongest.

I have, in my former works, dwelt on the remarkable mildness of that preparation in the Pharmacopœia, which is called Acetum Colchici, and must now repeat some of my statements. The College directs one ounce of the

fresh roots to seventeen ounces of fluid—sixteen of diluted acetic acid and one of proof spirit. For the vinum colchici (so called) the proportion of the fresh roots is twelve ounces to twelve ounces of fluid—four of proof spirit and eight of water. Besides this extraordinary difference of strength, arising from the different quantities of material in the two preparations, we may consider that the acetic acid exerts a modifying power over the active principles of the colchicum, as it does over opium and squills, rendering its action on the animal œconomy milder.

It has been my favorite practice to employ the acetum colchici* in preference to any other preparation, joining with it magnesia, or the carbonate, and, usually, sulphate of magnesia, as I fully set forth in my Treatise; so that, in this mode of administration, I not only prescribe a very mild preparation of the medicine, but, by means of the aperient ingredients just men-

* It is of the greatest importance that the preparation should be pure and genuine. The dose which I prescribe ranges from 20 minims to 90.

tioned, I prevent its stay in the stomach, and thereby save the coats of that organ from inconvenience. The deleterious agency of colchicum is far more likely to be produced when the stronger preparations are administered; and, when given in such form that of necessity the dose remains in the stomach for some considerable time. I admit that I cannot, by this method of treatment, remove the immediate symptoms so quickly as by the administration of a stronger preparation—the wine, for example; but I contend, that the slower and more gradual relief of the symptoms is to be preferred. Also, it is the greatest part of my argument, that the use of colchicum, even in the mildest form, is to be made entirely subservi nt to the more important consideration of using the most judicious means for effectually correcting the errors of the digestive organs, of the liver more especially. I am well persuaded that the strong preparations of colchicum have a great tendency to injure these functions; and, if there were no other reason, this would be a sufficient one for desiring their most cautious

employment. Even in regard to the acetum, I desire to use it with less freedom than formerly; not because I think it an unsafe medicine —quite the contrary—but because, in certain circumstances of gout, its use, even although joined with mild aperients, involves the consideration which I always wish to keep in view; that the most radical cure of the causes of gout is not to be found in the use of colchicum; that this medicine is only to be regarded as influential over the symptoms; and further, that, when the disposition to the returns of the disease is so strongly manifested, that colchicum ceases to exert more than a temporary influence, it is desirable that its use should be altogether abandoned.

I have already observed, that it is too common a practice for gouty persons to persist in having recourse to the wine of colchicum on every occasion of being attacked with gout. I speak now of those decided examples of the gouty constitution in which the disposition to the return of the paroxysm is strongly marked; and which becomes infinitely aggravated by

the free use of the medicine: nor is this increased frequency of the disease the least evil. It actually happens that the medicine, when very frequently employed, appears to act as a slow poison. Again and again have I witnessed that those who resort to it with great frequency, although not complaining of absolute disagreement from it, yet entirely lose all healthy appearance, and acquire so sallow a complexion as to convey the idea that the blood itself is deteriorated.

One gentleman, of strong frame, and of great original powers of constitution, constantly suppressed his gout with one or other of the strong preparations of colchicum; latterly attaching himself to the use of the wine. This practice at length brought on chronic inflammation of the mucous membrane of the stomach and bowels; and, under such disease, he pined and wasted, and gradually lost strength, and died.

Another, also of excellent constitution originally, not yet fifty years of age, treated himself in the same manner, but with greater boldness, and gave occasion to a more acute

attack upon the mucous membrane. The highest symptoms of irritation, affecting the stomach and intestines, arose; and, notwithstanding every exertion to arrest the disease, the fever and irritation wore out the injured powers of the constitution, and death took place in the course of a fortnight. This gentleman had been falling off in appearance, and flesh, and strength, for some months peviously, under the influence of almost constant doses of the wine of colchicum. He was warned of his danger, but to no purpose.

A third, approaching to his grand climacteric, a man endowed with a fine constitution, was so anxiously engaged in business, that he would not allow himself to be deprived of the means of procuring that quick respite from suffering and confinement, which the wine of colchicum afforded him. He had recourse to this medicine on every occasion, beginning with a dose of 30 drops; but by degrees so increasing it, that at length he found he could not relieve the symptoms with a smaller dose than 120 drops, which he commonly repeated on the following night.

Even by means of these larger doses, he could not latterly postpone the return of gout for more than forty-eight hours! His altered appearance soon gave alarm to his friends, and had he not been restrained from this course of proceeding, he would doubtless have fallen a victim. His health has been with difficulty brought to a state of amendment; but I hope that, by strict perseverance in proper measures, he will finally be restored.

One gentleman took Reynolds' specific, in alterative doses, almost every night for a whole year. He became thin, sallow, weak, and nervous, under its influence, on such terms only opposing the return of gout. But see the sad sequel. At the end of the fourteenth month, he died from hydrothorax!

In another case, the patient, aged 54, for many years subject to severe attacks of regular gout, had for the last two years treated himself with full doses of the wine of colchicum, always with the effect of immediately relieving the symptoms, but with the effect also of causing much shorter intervals between the fits. At

length his general health declined; his appearance became greatly changed; he looked sallow, was wasted, and reduced in strength. His pulse was weak and irregular; his breathing short, and he was awoke in the night with starting up in bed under the immediate dread of suffocation; and had a troublesome cough. Upon examination of the chest, it was evident that water was collected in one cavity of the pleura. Other frightful symptoms came on, affecting the heart, and the signs of enlargement of that vital organ became very conspicuous. He had urgent palpitations; could not lie down in bed; was now and then delirious while sitting in his easy chair, and it was continually expected that he would die from suffocation, so difficult was the breathing on the least exertion. The pulse ranged from 120 to 150. General anasarca of the lower part of the body took place in an extreme degree, and, lastly, ascites. By auscultation, the action of the heart was heard over the upper part of the right-side, and below the seventh rib on the left, and the bruit du sufflet (bellows' sound) and the rasp-file sounds, were

strongly marked. From this deplorable condition he was surprisingly restored by an active plan of treatment, which my present limits will only allow me to describe in the most concise manner. It consisted of two or three small bleedings from the arm; a combination of elaterium, calomel, digitalis, colocynth, and opium; blisters over the heart, followed by the use of an ointment composed of iodine, hydriodate of potash, and mercury. This was afterwards used by diligent friction. The anasarca was relieved by acupuncturation. He gradually recovered from what appeared to be a hopeless state. On the discontinuance of the active measures, a caustic issue was made over the heart, and which is still kept up. Ten months have now elapsed since the patient has resumed an active attention to his affairs, as a nobleman's steward. Now the action of the heart is almost natural. The recovery is the most surprising of the kind which I have ever witnessed in the course of my professional life. I must consider that the formidable train of symptoms was produced by the continued sup-

pression of the gout with the free doses of wine of colchicum; and by the baneful operation of the medicine, carelessly employed, upon the system.

I have stated some of the most remarkable cases of injury from the abuse of colchicum, which have fallen under my observation; but I could add largely to the list of most unsatisfactory results, which have been produced by the mistaken reliance given to it as a curative remedy for gout.

I now hear the question repeated, what final opinion is to be delivered to the gouty patient on the subject of Colchicum? Is it to be taken from him altogether as a remedy for his sufferings, on the score of prudence? I answer, certainly not. I conceive, that, in the way of general instruction, the following positions may be laid down. Some of my former observations I must recapitulate. Inasmuch as the acetum colchici is very greatly the mildest form of the medicine, it is desirable to obtain from it, in combination with a saline aperient, those palliative effects which are to be expected from colchicum. When any nausea or inconvenience is

experienced from the fluid form of the medicine, it may be given with advantage in the form of pill, the extract being used for this purpose, and other suitable medicine being joined with its use.

Some individuals, it is true, derive every satisfaction from using the wine of colchicum, taking a moderate dose at bed-time, for two or three nights, and paying due attention to the functions of the liver, bowels, &c. by means of other medicines. When gout not only readily yields to such treatment, but also does not return in a short time, I do not wish to offer any objection to this plan of treatment; much as I give the preference to my own method of using the acetum. As there is no general rule without its exception, so I may here remark, that circumstances may arise in which I should be disposed to give the wine; for example, when it may be necessary to avoid all excitement to the bowels; and when, at the same time, it is desirable to make the quickest impression on the gouty action and irritation.

From all which I have stated, the reader

will at once perceive, that I allow to colchicum the claim of possessing a greater power in relieving the immediate symptoms of gout, than any other medicine which we obtain from the Materia Medica. This, however, is too commonly found to be only a palliative power; because it is not unfrequently seen that the paroxysm returns the sooner, in the direct ratio in which it is employed.

In the manner in which I recommend the use of the acetum, the evil in question never follows in the same degree; and, generally speaking, the reproach is not at all deserved; because I employ it always in combination with alteratives, aperients, and other medicines, and desire to consider it as the auxiliary rather than the substantial remedy.

The gouty paroxysm depends upon internal errors of the system, for which colchicum is not in any of its forms the remedy; and were it not that its palliative influence is so superior to that of any other medicine, I would never employ it in the treatment of gout. I would always prefer to remove the fit by other medi-

cines, if I could succeed in a reasonable time; not because I view the judicious employment of colchicum as in any degree unsafe, but that I should expect the cure to be more lasting when its use can be omitted. Not only, indeed, does the gout return so much the sooner, and indeed with lamentable frequency, from the injudicious way in which colchicum is so commonly used; but, as I have already shewn, the constitution becomes injured: this injury is manifested in various ways. Most commonly the mucous membrane of the stomach and intestinal canal suffers chronic irritation. The appetite and digestive functions are impaired; the patient loses flesh and strength; and the whole appearance alters. I have related examples of a fatal result. In other cases, the patient does not complain of loss of appetite, or indigestion, but still he loses flesh and strength, and fails in nervous energy. The medicine is exerting its unfavorable influence on the nervous system; and, according to my observation, materially impairs the functions of the liver

None of these bad consequences ever result from the moderate use of the acetum colchici in combination with other appropriate medicines; but it is obvious that it may be so improperly given, as to call for much of that criticism which I have directed towards the other preparations.

The threatening symptoms of gout should scarcely ever be treated with any preparation of colchicum. The fit most commonly occurs as an attempt of nature to relieve the constitution; and much judgment is required in the interference of art. It is almost always proper to use evacuants, as I have before mentioned; and this treatment alone, together with reduction of the diet, sometimes proves effectual. But if, notwithstanding these measures, the gout fever, consisting of inflammation, pain, and universal irritation, makes its assault in a formidable manner, we are imperatively called upon to make use of colchicum. Let it be our care then to use it in such a manner as to afford a certain share of relief without injury to the system, rather than to aim at producing the

quickest present cure, with the prospect of those evil consequences which I have pourtrayed. I advise the employment of colchicum, only with reference to the gouty symptoms when they cannot be sufficiently relieved by other means. The truly curative treatment belongs to the use of other medicines, and to other measures.

It is with exceeding satisfaction, therefore, that I can now assure the reader of the unexpected success which I have lately obtained in some difficult cases of gout, without making any use of colchicum.

A gentleman, about 50 years of age, had been a complete martyr to gout for twenty years; and, latterly, rarely escaped an attack for more than six weeks. He was so disturbed in his nervous system by the influence of colchicum, after a few doses, however carefully administered, that he acquired a great dread of the medicine, notwithstanding that it invariably relieved the symptoms in a short time. In the investigation of the case, I found the strongest evidence of unhealthy action of the liver. The

excretions were exceedingly unnatural, varying for the most part from the colour of black to olive green. The urine usually deposited pink or lateritious sediment, and always very abundantly when gout was present.

I subjected him to a moderate but long-continued alterative mercurial course, with an active fluid purgative each morning for the first week, each other morning for the second week, and every second or third morning for the third and fourth weeks. When a gouty attack occurred, I relieved the symptoms very satisfactorily by means of opiates, sudorifics, and diuretics, in addition to the plan just mentioned. At a later period, I prescribed sarsaparilla with alkali; still directing a close attention to the state of the alimentary canal.

The whole course of treatment being brought to a conclusion, the patient left home for change of air, first going to the sea-side, and afterwards to an inland spot. He virtuously adhered to the strict plan of diet which was laid down for his observance; and such has been his reward, that, during the last six months, he has

only been affected with gout twice in a slight degree, and the symptoms yielded favorably without any aid from colchicum. It is delightful to witness the happy change in this gentleman's appearance and constitution. He assures me that he has not enjoyed such feelings of health before within the last six years.

In another case, in which the patient took the wine of colchicum very frequently, the same kind of disagreement was not produced; but there were the evil consequences, of dyspepsia, loss of flesh and strength, and very increased frequency of attack. I was called upon to prescribe any means of treatment I thought proper, with the exception of colchicum. The case was difficult, for the disposition to gout was inveterate. I directed my chief attention to the functions of the digestive organs, and very especially of the liver; and, when the course of alteratives, aperients, and corrective tonics was completed, I took the earliest opportunity of sending the patient into the country, desiring that he should make repeated changes of air; in itself a remedy of the highest importance.

The improvement in the health and constitution of this gentleman is most satisfactory, nor has he of late been much inconvenienced by gout.

Amongst the most important principles which can be stated for the method of practice in gout, I may enumerate the following data. That no two cases of gout can be treated exactly alike in every particular; and it will rarely happen that even the same patient will find advantage in adopting precisely the same measures in different attacks of gout. It is always incumbent on us to investigate, carefully, every case which comes before us; and to consider the influence of all the predisposing and exciting causes, both moral and physical, which may have had a share in producing the attack. Our treatment will be modified accordingly as mental anxiety and bodily fatigue, or a continued course of convivial irregularity, may have predisposed the body; or as exposure to wet and cold, or accidental excess at the table, or any powerful mental emotion, may have excited the attack. A regular application of remedies founded on

such scientific analysis of the disease, is surely to be distinguished, very widely, from the narrow empirical plan of the patient himself, in resorting to wine of colchicum.

One of the most inconvenient consequences arising to the physician from the colchicum practice, as it may be termed, is the extreme reluctance of the patient to submit himself to the slower but more sure effects of regular treatment. Accustomed, as he has been, to liberate himself from pain and confinement in the short space of not many hours, he refuses his consent to measures which are attended with a continued confinement; but I hope that this mistaken calculation of advantages will cease to be made, and the truth come home to his mind, that there is no such short road to health, as he has been falsely led to imagine.

Numerous are the instances in which the period for the most useful exercise of the skill of the physician is, after the termination of the fit, when he is called upon to investigate the condition of the several constitutional functions, and prescribe his measures accordingly.

The regulation of the diet is a most important consideration, and also that of the general regimen.

When the disposition to recurrence of gout is inveterate, it is in vain to attempt to conquer it by medicine alone. Change of air, of scene, and of the general habits, must be insisted upon.

Various are the baths which may be advised for assistance to the limbs and the external part of the frame. Not, however, that I would be supposed to consider that baths act merely as an external remedy.

Every gouty patient is aware of the advantage of always maintaining a due attention to the function of the bowels. I can mention, with great approbation, the compound of carbonate of soda, carbonate of magnesia, powder of rhubarb, and powder of camomile, in small doses, with the addition of ginger or cinnamon; to be taken at bed-time, mixed with a little tepid water, three or four times a week, and, in some cases, every night regularly. More active medicines may be required occasionally.

It is, unfortunately, the nature of gout, that it is again called into action by a greater number of remote causes than any other disease, and especially by too much indulgence in the pleasures of the table, from which few have the prudence sufficiently to refrain.

I have now to examine the merits of veratria as an external application, recommended by Dr. Turnbull. It is not my intention to make any trial of it or its salts, internally, in gout; for I hope I have already shewn very fully that colchicum, in which veratria is the active principle, is a medicine quite potent enough for our purpose; and, also, requiring much judgment in its use.

This author, at the conclusion of his chapters on the successful employment of veratria, used in spirituous solution, or as an ointment, in various diseases, observes that, amongst additional diseases in which much benefit has been derived from this remedy, " the one that has the greatest claim to consideration is gout; a disease, in the treatment of which the veratria promises to be a no less valuable acquisition

than it has proved itself to be in other painful affections; and, indeed, so far as experience goes, there is every reason to anticipate the greatest advantage from its application, even in long-standing cases. The best time to employ it appears to be at the very commencement of the accession; and, at this period, friction for twenty minutes, made over the seat of pain, with an ointment consisting of twenty grains of veratria to an ounce of lard, has cut short the paroxysm, and has at once enabled the patient to make use of the affected joints." In the history of the remedy he informs us that "Mr. Majendie appears to have been the first person who suggested the external application of veratria in rheumatism, gout, and anasarca; but his proposition does not seem to have been complied with, neither does he himself appear to have been fully aware of its great importance in a medicinal point of view; and, indeed, the weakness of the preparations recommended by him, even had they been made use of, must have prevented the very striking effects produced upon certain diseases

by the veratria, when more freely employed, from coming under his observation."

I have now made a very considerable trial of the veratria ointment as an external application in gout (to the consideration of which I shall at present confine myself), and with such share of satisfaction in its effects, that I acknowledge myself much indebted to the work of Dr. Turnbull for the possession of a very useful remedy; but I must, at the same time, declare my conviction that he has largely over-rated its powers. A priori, it is contrary to reason to expect that this, or any local application, should be capable of removing a set of symptoms which wholly depend on the constitution; and, further, if I possessed such a remedy, I would avoid making use of it; for our chief treatment should be directed to the constitution. The cold-water plan of Dr. Kinglake comes the nearest towards a cure by local means; but no wise man will use or recommend it.

I have carefully watched the operation of the veratria ointment, and my experience di-

rects me not to expect any good effects from it, till a certain amount of impression has been made on the constitution by means of general treatment.

When severe inflammatory gout has fixed upon the joints, any local treatment is, to say the least of it, almost useless.—I mean, while the constitutional force of the disease is at its height. When this subsides, I find that the patient receives much comfort and relief from the alcoholic lotion, which I mention so fully in my Treatise, used by means of linen rags and oil-silk; or with grated bread as a poultice—always to be applied tepid. I shall not go into those details which will be found elsewhere; but I wish to observe that, notwithstanding all I have said of the constitutional nature of gout, I do attach much importance to local treatment as an auxiliary.

To return to the subject of the veratria. I have not thought proper to prescribe it, as Dr. Turnbull expresses his recommendation, at the very commencement of the accession; because I disapprove of the principle of using

local treatment so early; and I should consider it to be, together with friction, inadmissible at the very height of the inflammation.

When I have succeeded in reducing the force of the disease by means of general treatment, I have considered the period to be arrived for the employment of the veratria liniment. I shall avoid the relation of all the cases in which I have prescribed it, and confine myself to what I think will be a sufficient illustration of the subject.

A gentleman, aged 60, labouring under subacute gout, which affected one elbow, one knee and the hamstrings, and one ankle, after being for a certain period under general regular treatment, made use of the veratria liniment, in the proportion of eight grains to the ounce, which was rubbed in upon each affected part for ten minutes. The elbow and the knee, particularly, were in considerable pain at the commencement of the friction, and which was soon exchanged for sensations of an extraordinary warmth, which he felt to be pleasing rather than the contrary, and by sharp tinglings,

which he compared to galvanism. On the following day, the swelling and stiffness of the parts were lessened. The friction was repeated night and morning; but it was found necessary to increase the strength of the ointment, which was done gradually, till the proportion of the veratria was twenty grains to the ounce of lard; and this quantity did not produce more sensation than the smaller occasioned at first. The patient finally declared that he derived very great relief and benefit from the remedy; but that it did not remove the tenderness, and what he called weakness, of the parts. The bursal enlargements, the distension of the tendonous sheaths, and the ligamentous thickenings, were evidently diminished by the application; but it appeared ineffectual towards restoring the use of the joints. In these circumstances, abundant friction with an embrocation, composed of tinct. opii, linim. sapon. compos. et liquor ammon. acet. used tepid, had a superior and a very useful effect.

A lady, aged 44, subject to severe attacks of regular gout, in an unusually severe paroxysm,

derived great benefit from the internal medicines which I prescribed; but she remained entirely lame, from the tender, swollen, and rather painful state of the ankle-joint and foot. I directed the veratria ointment, in the strength of ten grains to the ounce; and the good effects of the application were very quickly shewn. She described that she was in considerable pain at the commencement of the friction, but that it abated at the end of twenty minutes, and was exchanged for strong prickings like those from electric sparks, and a remarkable warmth, rather agreeable than the contrary*. These sensations lasted about an hour. On the following morning the swelling of the ankle and foot was much reduced, and allowed of standing. A further perseverance with the remedy proved very beneficial; and this lady, by means of it, and further general treatment, recovered in the most favorable manner.

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* The nurse, who rubbed in the ointment, had omitted to put on an oil-silk glove, and was rather inconvenienced by these sensations through the night.

A gentleman, aged 60, one of the greatest martyrs to gout that I ever saw, was seized with sciatica and lumbago, at the same time that he was affected with sharp gout in the knee. There was much error in the state of the biliary system. I prescribed mercurial evacuants, sudorifics, and sedatives. After six days of this treatment, although improved in his general condition, he complained of continued suffering from the sciatic nerve, and great, though not equal, distress from the knee. The veratria ointment was rubbed in upon each affected part. It produced the sensations of heat and electric-like prickings for nearly an hour, and very decidedly relieved the complaint. It was repeated three or four times with complete success. The skin became irritated, as if by a strong rubefacient, but no sore followed. The patient was highly gratified by the effects of the remedy.

A gentleman suffering from sub-acute gout in the knee applied the ointment with due friction regularly for a week; but he informs me, by letter, without the least advantage. I have not

the opportunity of knowing whether or not the sensation of heat and prickings took place; but certainly, so far as my experience has hitherto gone, I have seen that the application has wholly failed to give relief, or produce apparent benefit, when no sensation at the time of friction with the ointment, or afterwards, has been produced*.

Another patient, too anxious for the quickest relief, used the remedy on the second day of an attack of acute gout in the foot, the part not being so exquisitely tender as to prevent moderate friction. Active evacuants had been taken at short intervals with full effect. The proportion of the veratria was ten grains to the ounce. No particular sensations ensued from the friction, and no apparent benefit resulted. Five grains of veratria were added, and the friction was followed up for a longer time. Now the patient became very sensible

* Dr. Turnbull, in his Introductory Observations on the Agency of the Veratria Ointment, points out very fully the importance of this test of its proper action. The *purity* of the preparation is indispensable.

of the peculiar sensations before mentioned. On the following day, there was a very manifest abatement of the gout; and the patient acknowledged the improvement. In conjunction with its further use, I prescribed the mild colchicum aperient draught and alteratives. The recovery was uninterrupted, and a favorable convalescence was established in the course of a fortnight.

My conclusive opinion of the action of the veratria ointment in gout, is, that we may consider it to be entirely a local remedy. I have not detected any constitutional effects to be produced by it, in any case of gout in which I have prescribed it. Probably the absorbents of a part affected with gout are in a torpid state. I have discontinued the application immediately that the symptoms have been relieved. I think it a very useful application in gout; and, applied at the proper period, a valuable auxiliary to the general treatment; but I cannot for one moment raise it to the importance of being, substantively, a curative treatment for gout. It is no small praise of the application, that

it does not produce any inconvenient effects: and the patient is pleased with its mode of operation.

In bringing this little essay to a conclusion, I wish to express how lasting a satisfaction it will be to my mind, if I have set forth a clear and useful caution to gouty invalids, to avoid the frequent and familiar employment of colchicum; a medicine valuable for its purposes as a palliative of suffering, but not to be relied upon as a certain curative agent. It is a remedy which, unless the fit of gout be a *desirable* event, may with propriety be used for the relief and comfort which it is capable of affording, moderately and occasionally; but which, if employed with frequency in large doses, or almost constantly in small, is to be dreaded as a certain instrument of injury; always sooner or later inflicting great mischief on the constitution; and, now and then, leading to dangerous, and even fatal disease.

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